

FOOD AND BEVERAGE BUSINESS ACCELERATOR PLANNING GRANT UPDATE

October 28, 2025

Presented by Hope Lawrence, Venture Central



About Hope Lawrence

Raised on a cattle farm in Fauquier County
→ Lifelong connection to Virginia agriculture



Early career: Product Manager, Standard & Poor's & Fitch Ratings (CFA)
→ Finance and operations background

2012: Started Hudson Henry Baking Co. from my Fluvanna farm
→ Sold the first bag of granola at the Charlottesville City Market
→ 6 sofi Awards (“Oscars of the CPG world”)
→ Finance Committee, Specialty Food Association
→ Successful exit in 2022

Now: Board Member, Carver Center | Board Member, CIC
Program Manager, Venture Central

Passion: Helping food entrepreneurs scale — and “talking shop”

Planning Grant Project Overview

Mission: Evaluate need for a food and beverage (non-alcoholic) accelerator for Region 9 food manufacturers to scale beyond local markets

Target: Packaged food manufacturers

Timeline: February 2025 - February 2026

Key work to be accomplished:

- Engage stakeholders and assess needs
- Research other programs and best practices to design accelerator
- Develop partnerships, plan operations, and create funding strategy

Our goal is for Region 9 F&B business owners to have access to the resources, expertise, and networks they need to **grow and stay** in Region 9, ultimately creating higher-paying jobs and traded-sector tax revenue.

What we found



180+ food
businesses in
our region



80 CPG

100+ farms,
caterers, food
trucks



69% stuck
\$100 K–\$1 M



Lack of
business
expansion
resources

The Opportunity

Large employer +
low wages = high-
impact opportunity



2,629 jobs /
lowest wages
(\$37,294) in our
region

Entrepreneurs
want support!



86% want
specialized
support

Opportunity to
improve and
deliver



Only 33% rate
existing
resources as
"Good" or
"Excellent"

State and
Regional Interest



Investments in
commercial
kitchens, VEDP
engagement in
industry

Programming plan

Accelerator (acceleration programming, mentors, peer networks)

Municipality- specific training open to all

Resource Hub - open to all

Continuous pipeline —from farm to factory to scale.

Collaboration and Progress

6 localities tentatively committed for \$100K in cash match with meetings with all localities by the end of October

Supportive partners: BEACON, Carver, SBDC, CIC, VEDP, VDACS

Actively seeking funding for ongoing sustainability

What's next?

- Program refinement
- Strategic funding applications
- Implementation application submitted
December 9th for January Board Meeting